

Under the Rainbow: Oral Histories of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual,
Transgender, Intersex and Queer People in Kansas

Pat Miller
Oral History

Interviewed by
Tami Albin

March 21, 2008

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Transcript

Transcribed by Transcriptions by Nina. Time-stamped and reviewed for accuracy by Rachel Gadd-Nelson. Lightly edited and reviewed by Tami Albin. Transcript has been reviewed and approved by Pat Miller.

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Pat Miller: Narrator

Tami Albin: Interviewer

00:00:00

TAMI ALBIN: Will hit record on this. Okay so today is (laughter) March 21, 2008 and I'm here with Pat Miller. So I'll start off this interview as I start off all my oral histories is, Tell me where you were born and when.

00:00:17

PAT MILLER: Well let's see, I was born in Southern California back in 1958 and I was actually adopted by a nice couple who were well into their thirties. So I had kind of a more traditional background. Some of the manners and things were more from the World War II kind of era, So that made me different. I always knew I was adopted. And they always were really okay with me finding my birth parents. Oh I knew I—I didn't know I was gay. I knew that God had made a mistake and put me in the wrong body, okay. I used to want to be a boxer or I wanted to do all the boy things. And I could do them as good or better than they could. I was bigger and stronger than pretty much anybody. And we had a ranch so I had a lot of responsibilities with physical work. And—I hope this comes out right I'm going to say it—we used to play house and I was always daddy. I mean that was just what I was. And I always liked women. I never liked boys. But you try so hard to make your parents happy.

And when I was thirteen I got—my father passed on and I got drugged back kicking and screaming to St. Louis, (laughs) to my mother's side of the family who were very proper Catholics. And then you get even more hatred for yourself because you just can't fit into the role that they're expecting you to fit into. And of course my father was very skinny and my mother worked hard to stay thin but she did that, and I've always been heavy. So there was even more self loathing because I couldn't be the little girl she wanted. I was always kind of a big clumsy girl. (laughs)

And when I was seventeen, just out of high school, I went into a program called Job Corps and met a friend there who, through a series of incidences, ended up—we ended up living together and we slept together. And we knew nothing other than, lesbians were something ooh nasty and they were bad. And yet somehow we had this love relationship and to some extent the physical relationship. It wasn't until 1977 when we

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had gone back to California and I was not happy with California. So we ended up hitchhiking up to Oregon. And a friend let us stay there for a while with her and I got a job, got an apartment and met a couple of women that said, Oh yeah we're lesbians. And we were just like them. And it's like, Oh is that what we are? (laughs)

00:04:08

ALBIN: So you hadn't even identified at that point?

00:04:10

MILLER: We hadn't—I mean, we just thought we were somehow different. And she ended up, when we eventually split up—and we were together almost two years or just over two years I can't remember—she has been with men ever since. So the only women to my knowledge that she's ever been with was me. And we—again we went through Job Corps because they offered to feed me, train me, clothe me, house me and guarantee me a job when I got out. (laughs) So I went in to become a telephone installer because my mother had worked for the telephone company for thirty-three years and Ma Bell in those days was always going to be here.

And I went in and just at that time the teacher had left and they didn't have it so they'd closed down that program. And then a little old lady who was probably close to seventy says, Well you can be a secretary or we have cook or—and in the other Job Corps I had tried welding. I didn't like it, it was too hot. And I said, Well what's this new building trades program that just opened up? She says, Oh well you can't do that, that's not for girls. And I says, What do you mean it's not for girls? She says, Well if you really want to you can go in. So I went into the carpentry program. I was the thirteenth woman to join. I was the first and only—first to graduate from that program. I liked Job Corps. I stayed in nine months. I only had to stay in six but I (laughs) stayed in an extra three, I just liked it.

I came out and started working—well I should say, they guarantee you a way into the union, okay. Well they said, Well where do you want to go Pat? And I says, Well maybe back to St. Louis? They came back a few weeks later. They said, Look. They said, We guaranteed you a way into the union and if you really want to go to St. Louis we will fight for you to go there and work. He said, But I want you to know they really don't want you. And I said, Okay well how about I just stay here in Portland? And they

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said, Okay. And so they got me into the union in Portland, and I think it only took about two weeks for me to get a job. And then—you can get any union jobs that come along or you can actually go out and find a job you want. And there was one particular high rise. It was the Marriott Building in downtown Portland and I really wanted to work there.

So every morning that I was unemployed I'd show up with my tools and my lunchbox and as the superintendent came on the job I'd shake his hand and say, I really want to work for you. Well he wasn't too keen on that (laughs) but he changed foremens and that foreman liked women. And so one day he says, Well you might as well come work for me. You show up more than the guys that I hire. So I worked high rise for a while on that and went from a couple different jobs. That job that I wanted so bad, as long as that foreman was there I was great. The day that they changed foremens, the foreman came out to me—and it was a real hot day. Hot for Portland meant it was maybe 92. And the guys have to ask permission to take off their shirt on a union job. They'd say, Boss, Take off my shirt? Yeah, he'd say. So he came up to me and he says, You can take off your shirt too if you want to. And I said, No that's okay. And I know that's sexual harassment by today's standards but in those days that was nothing, okay? And he says, Well I can't take off my shirt because my little (clears throat) get burned. And I didn't know what I could say here.

00:08:40

ALBIN: Say whatever you want.

00:08:41

MILLER: Oh. He says, I can't take off my shirt because my little nipples—and he does this—my little nipples would get sunburned. And so I (clears throat) told him where he could do to himself and—(laughs) and went on working which is what guys do to each other, and I had to adopt that kind of concept. Well I was fired the next day for not doing my job. And the union—(interruption) the union said that they would fight for me. But in those days they had a blacklist and I just took the unemployment for—well I didn't get unemployment but I just went on to another job. They put me at the top of the list and they said, Fine, and I just went on. But it was hard in those days.

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Then I got a job with the school district, who needed a woman because they had five hundred men and they needed a woman and a black. (laughs) Well they didn't worry about Hispanics in those days, I mean they were just kind of with white people, I don't know. And so I got hired there. And most of the bosses liked me except one who gave me a lot of grief. And after seven years of working there, all the bosses had retired except the one who didn't like me. And within two months of him becoming head boss I was fired for stealing which—I proved that I wasn't stealing but I couldn't get my job back so—in that time working for the school district I went to a particular school and met a janitor. I was nineteen and she was twenty-six at the time. And in this big room full of men (laughs) we end up managing to tell each other that we're lesbians. She had a book and she opened it up and she pushed the thing to me. It said, *The Lesbian Mother* because she kept on talking about all these kids. She had five kids. I went, No lesbian has five children. But she did. (laughs)

And we hooked up together and—I don't know. For some reason we didn't get officially married until we were together about eight years. (laughs) But we raised the kids together. We were the—we and—I should say the kids, I kept on forgetting. When I hooked up with her she had all five kids in the house at her own house type thing. And she said her husband and her were—they were—I thought she meant divorced but she meant separated. And when he heard that I was—that she had a woman around kind of permanently he came back and wanted to fight. It was kind of some bad situations. And of course then, he moved into an apartment near and we tried to do the thing with the kids visiting and all that stuff but the divorce was going to be nasty and it was.

There was no way we were going to be able to not admit we were lesbians. In the old days you just said, Oh no, prove I'm a lesbian, and you could still have your kids. We had a lawyer who worked at the Lesbian Community Law Project or Women's Community Law Project, something like that had that seventies feel, liberation and all that stuff. Her name was Catherine English and she had just gotten out of law school. And she says, Yeah let's fight for your kids. She says, I need a thousand dollars by Monday. And this was like Friday we were talking to her.

We literally walked out into the bars with coffee cans. People would make announcements and say, These two women are going for custody and they need a

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thousand dollars by Monday. And I can remember people putting in tens and twenties. And the tens and twenties was like fifties and hundreds now. They didn't know us or nothing, but it was that, Oh man we have got to have our children. That's what really what it was about. We went to court and the judge asked her, he said, if I'm going to make you choose which will you choose, your children or your girlfriend? And she said, Judge, which do you want me to cut off my left arm or my right? And it was kind of left at that. In his ruling he said, Our relationship was inherently temporary because I was twenty years old and she was my second girlfriend in that time, and therefore that he felt five children were too much for any one parent so he gave the father the two older girls who wanted to go with him and take care of daddy and the three younger children went to us.

And so that's where it went. And we raised the children the best we could. The girls—the older girls came and went. Our children stayed with us until they were fourteen and then we figured by fourteen they were set enough in their minds, they knew right from wrong, that they could go live with their father if they wanted to or not. And some went at fourteen, some went at closer to sixteen, but they all went eventually and lived with him who—he had moved out to Kansas, because all this was happening in Oregon. And then eventually they all met people out here and married and all the grandchildren started happening out here. Juanita and I—that was my partner's name—were together sixteen years.

We got a little bout of empty nest syndrome there about thirteen years together. I think the kids were gone probably by a couple of—maybe two to three years maybe max and so we ended becoming foster parents. And we were in the process of adopting four little boys when she had her car accident and was killed. And that was really hard because I had to give the boys back because they were all some level of alcohol affected or syndrome and—and it was hard for me because (laughs) I was thirty-six years old and I had never been an adult not married. (laughs) And I'm not a big partygoer. I had already done my drinking—excuse me. (interruption) She and I were always—we were both farm kids so we always had animals with our kids. And we had at one point moved out from Portland into a small town and—(interruption)

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ALBIN: So what was it like for these five kids and then eventually you had three. What was it like for them having lesbian parents in the eighties?

00:17:48

MILLER: Yeah, late seventies, early eighties. In one way it was tough and in another way I don't think that it mattered. For the two oldest girls who moved with their father to Kansas it was horrible. He was angry and—these are stories that the kids told us. The oldest daughter came home one time and she says, Daddy's so mad he says that—when I bring a friend over he says, Why do you want to be friends with my daughter? Her mother's a lesbian. And so he really was angry and in Kansas, my God a lesbian meant there might be a taint on the children too.

Out in Oregon the children all marched with us at all the Gay Prides. They did wear—we did wear—the one year I can remember the most is—was I think '83 when Mount St. Helens had blown and so we could wear a mask. Most of the times we kept the children's face covered and our own because we both worked for the school district and as well the children, we didn't want them to be an object of anybody's problem.
(interruption)

We—somebody had started this group called the Lesbian Parenting Alliance, and we joined. And the next thing I know we were running it. And what we did was like every couple of weeks we'd get together, the kids would get together. We'd have picnics or even if it was just a get-together at a house and the kids would color together. So we had support for each other. And we met a lot of women that—gone through custody battles and lost. Some went through custody battles. One lady went through a custody battle and her husband was a police officer in a small town on the coast and her children were literally—she was driving out of town with them and the cops stopped her—not her husband, another cop—and literally took the children away from her and hid—and they hid them and it was—it was traumatic. We were quite the success story that virtually nobody else was able to make. In time the lawyer, Catherine English, became a family court judge. And then as it was more and more okay to be a lesbian I guess she went out and she toured the country doing speaking tours and things like that. So our kids, they dealt with it pretty doggone well.

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I can remember in the first days the march through Portland streets was a protest, okay. And we had chants—We're Here, We're Queer, We're in your Face, whatever the chants were. And I can remember this one big group being on the corner and the guy was really yelling, Turn to Jesus or burn in hell. And Daniel, our—kind of our soft boy, he was about six, listened a little too much and came into the Pride area where it was all safe and kind of crying. And I says, What's wrong? And he says, Well that man says mommy's going to hell. And the kids were raised Catholic. As a matter of fact, they were in a Catholic school during the divorce and we had asked the sisters to come and baby-sit the children while we were in court and they knew—they knew we were gay but they couldn't verbally openly say, Oh it's okay but they still supported us and gave us help, and that was pretty special.

00:22:40

ALBIN: So there wasn't any problem at the school?

00:22:43

MILLER: There wasn't. As a matter of fact, Juanita and her husband were quite low income and so the school kind of gave them the tuition. And so I actually came in and said, Well we've got to do something for the tuition. And we started paying something and I actually took over the maintenance of the school, since that's what I did for Portland public schools. And things that Portland Public schools would throw out, wood and things, I would collect and they would do art projects on it and little things like that. And I worked on their basketball floor and whatever else.

And anyway Daniel was crying so I took him to a Dignity priest and I just left him. In those days we could. Now in Kansas everybody still kind of lets their children go here which was really unusual when I moved here. It's like, Wait the children are too far. And people still have that sense of safety here with kids. West coast you just can't leave your kids anywhere because there's too much danger. And when he came back he was okay. He didn't say a whole lot about it. The next year he says, Can we make a sign to carry in the parade? I said, Sure honey you can make a sign. And he made the—and I'll tell you, it's the first time I ever saw it. He said, God Made Gays Too. Now whether that priest told him that or whether he saw it somewhere other than Portland, I don't know. But he made that sign and I was so proud of him. And—but they marched every year with us and enjoyed the fun and the activities and being with the other kids.

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It wasn't really until they moved to Kansas that there was any problem. And I guess there's still some social stigmas here. My daughter is a—my oldest daughter—one of the girls who was raised by her dad, is a deputy for Sedgwick County and she still is terrified that people would find out that her mother's a lesbian. I—when we were having a good relationship she would kind of say, Well she's kind of my extra aunt while all the other kids are saying, Well she's our other mother. And people would get confused it's like, huh, huh? And the husband had come out and gotten with another lady and so he had another child so the kids had a half sister. And when we moved out she just enjoyed us so much that she now calls us her extra moms. (laughs) (telephone ringing)

(interruption)

00:26:12

ALBIN: So where were we?

00:26:13

MILLER: Well we were talking about kids. I think that the thing I like the most is that we have an all-American family, okay, win lose or draw. We don't have the perfect family. We're not Beaver Cleaver or whoever. Our oldest daughter is divorced once—married once, divorced once, has two children, is a deputy for Sedgwick County. Our second daughter married a Muslim man who was here for an education. (interruption) And she lives—she—they lived here for a while but she actually lives now in Qatar with him and they have six children. And they lived here in the United States until it got—the older ones got to be school age and he wanted them to be raised Muslim. And she covers and the whole bit. She's okay with that concept. And it's not what I would have chosen but my mother didn't choose my life either so I'm not one to say. Our second son is a jerk. He uses women and he has children that he doesn't take care of and—but grandma knows who they are and grandma takes care of them when she can. And I've tried to correct him and he won't listen. Our second son was a marine, has been married twice but this one is—yeah, ten fifteen years now something like that. And he has three children now. And our youngest daughter was married—well just divorced, had one little girl and she was shot and killed by her boyfriend that she met on the Internet.

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Good or bad, yeah, I would have changed some things if I could have. I do wish that somehow I could have helped more, but I met Juanita and the kids, the kids were four through nine so those early formative years had already been set. And there was violence and other stuff in the home because Juanita didn't want to be straight (laughs) but she didn't really know how to be gay and she was kind of learning that when I met her. I mean she'd been kind of messing around for a couple of years, getting rid of the husband and all. At twenty I probably didn't have the best parenting skills, (laughs) but I love them, I still love them.

Right now they're—I'm the evil stepmother so I'm real limited on how many grandchildren I get to see. I think I have, let's see six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven children of the original five. But then I count Colleen's couple, and then there's some children that I've been in their life from day one that they call me grandma. And one of my son's children is in a family the mother kept him and a man met and married her and he adopted the boy, okay. And so he is my grandson. And yet he has—let's see, I got to count that up—five other—(laughs) She has—keeps on having babies. He has five other siblings. There's no way for me to walk in that house and say, I'm your grandma and I'm not those other kids' grandma. So I have a bunch of grandkids there and I think at last count kids that really—I mean are close to me there's about seventeen grandchildren that we get presents for and we keep birthdays and da, da, da, da, da.

And then most—all the neighborhood kids call me Grandma Pat and they all know this is a safe house. And up until just recently we had one little young gal—I think she's in fourth grade now—who her house was very chaotic and she had a mixed-race family. She's mixed race. And she would come in sometimes and just sit down and read a book with us and just talk. We have a mixed-race family. We have mixed-race grandchildren and we don't want to make it an issue, okay? This little girl, when I met her she said, Oh I wish I was white. And I says, Honey I says, you're just the perfect color. You are what you are. I hope she can learn that, that kids—I hope all kids someday can be who they are—whether they're black, white, gay, straight or whatever, because they deserve to be who they are. Maybe if they're mean or something maybe then we want to change them but I don't see why we—my mother, we were walking down the mall one day and I think I'm thirteen and thirteen I was taller than her already by then. And she tells me she says, Take shorter steps. You never want to out step

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your man. (laughs) Like I said, World War II kind of thoughts. But she was very happy, very content having the men in the front seat when they went somewhere and the women sat in the back, that kind of thing. And (laughs) it was just kind of weird to me but that was the thing in the old days.

00:32:54

ALBIN: Right. So at what point did you—I mean you talked about how you knew you were adopted. At what point did you find your birth parents?

00:33:00

MILLER: Oh I found my birth parents when I was twenty-five years old. It was very strange. I got to tell you this because I was born and raised in Southern California; I'd got drugged back out to St. Louis. I went back to California and then hitchhiked up north to Oregon and stayed there on a whim. Five years after I had decided to stay there I got a call from the adoption lady. In California they'll release all the paperwork and everything. And she says, Your birth mother wants to meet you and all this stuff. (interruption) And they had—they were supposed to all sign this paperwork and then the lady was supposed to release the paperwork. Well we had been planning and waiting. And one day I called her up like on a Friday and it's like—it's a three-day weekend. It's like, It should be released by now. It's been a month-and-a-half. And she goes, Oh my God I forgot to send the paperwork to your birth mother and you're just going to have to wait.

Well she had given me non-identifiable information—my brother Jack, Jr. Well I still had the first page of my adoption record. That's all I had, and it said Baby Girl Hall. So now I knew my father's name was Jack Hall. I knew he had owned a wrecking yard, non-identifiable information. When I finally hit a brick wall Friday night and I was so frustrated I just went to bed. And my wife, Juanita at the time, she was not a bullshitter. She was very cut-dried, say it, boom. I wake up Saturday morning and she's on the phone. You can tell she is giving somebody—well back in the—my daddy kind of knew this man and I just don't know where—and she found the wrecking yard that was owned by Jack Hall.

00:35:11

ALBIN: Wow.

00:35:12

MILLER: And so we literally got the kids in the car, packed a lunch and we went out and started knocking on doors. What's amazing to me is people kept on saying, No we don't know who—where he is, we don't know where he is. When they looked at me they must have dropped their jaw because my sister and I are almost twins. And—(laughs) eventually they said, Well your brother Tim—well she hadn't told me about my two little brothers, just my older brother and sister. And I walk into this house after Tim says, Well come and I'll take you to—you follow the house and get every—all the family together. And I walk in there's this woman in a wheelchair and she's got my face. It's like, Wow this is weird. And then I sit there and wait a few minutes and then the door opens and this little (laughs) lady walks in. And she's about four foot ten—no she's sixty inches, she is, five foot. We measured her, I forgot. She is sixty inches tall and she is sixty inches around. She reminds you of the mayor's wife on the *Wizard of Oz*. And she says, Hi so which one of you two am I in trouble with? (laughs) Because that's my mother. Well of course I stand up. She knows it's got to be me not Juanita. I've got everybody's face.

So it was fascinating. And the weirdest part was they had lived fifty miles away from me and I didn't know it. And my brother who wouldn't come down and meet me because they all said, Oh yeah she's just like Sandy, the sister, okay. He lived up in Portland. He wouldn't come down and meet me. So finally I got his address on the last day and I went to his house. He wouldn't come down and meet me because Sandy was very mean to him about his lifestyle. Ends up he was gay, he went to the same bars I was going to. I mean he went to the men's bars, I went to the women's bars but there were still crossover bars too. We went to the same bars and everything. It was amazing. And all my life I'd wanted a little brother and I finally had him. And it was so cool. And we're both gay. And his family had really given him a lot of grief about his lifestyle until they met me. And then it was like, Okay now wait a minute, it seems to run in the family here. I mean, I'm not going to say it absolutely runs in the family or you absolutely choose it. I think that's a combination of both. But I do believe that it runs in my family, because we can track it, absolutely every generation, even several in each generation. And so it was kind of a vindication of my parents. They kind of like, Okay well we didn't do anything wrong, it just is. And so it was fun.

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I got to know them for twenty years. I thank God everyday I was adopted. (laughs) They're nice people but I didn't want them to be my parents. And I got my little brother that I always wanted. When the news came that he was HIV-positive it was hard. He was one of the first one thousand diagnosed in Oregon. He did a lot of crying and one night he says, Pat what do I do? And I says, You set a goal for yourself. You set a goal and you do not stop until you've achieved that goal. And he—and this is in the beginning. He says, Well I want to live twenty years, okay? And that was just absolutely unheard of in those days. You just weren't going to live twenty years. And on the twenty-year anniversary he comes back and he says, Pat I don't know what to do. I've done my goal. What do I do now? I says, Baby you set another goal. (laughs) So his goal is to be the longest living person with AIDS or HIV—he has AIDS now. And of course we've got so many more better medicines and everything. If he did ever reach that goal it'd be squashed right away. But just the fact that he really wants to live out an old age now. And he's—(laughs) Let's see, I'm forty nine so he's forty-four. And he was diagnosed when he was twenty-one—

00:40:36

ALBIN: Wow since twenty-three?

00:40:38

MILLER: Yeah, twenty-three years—twenty-three, twenty-four, somewhere in there. Yeah so it's pretty special. I'm saddened though because, for him, he got AIDS dementia really bad and our family has some mental health issues anyhow and I just can't allow him to abuse me. There's only so much you can take. And so I've disconnected contact with him. He's still out in Oregon. I hear he's doing well. He's got a partner who's a drag queen and he likes doing that. They're into the shows and everything. And he and my wife performed together and they had a lot of fun because she was one of the first drag kings we ever heard of back in the early eighties.

And I can remember them doing the local show called the Embers and the hostess of the show goes, Okay now I want everybody to know that one of these is a woman. Which one? Clap for this one, over my wife's head, nobody claps. Puts her hand over David, everybody claps. It's like, No this is the woman. (laughs) But he taught her to dress really well and he taught her about putting a little sock there (laughs) and the

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whole bit. And one day she went to the bathroom—and this is in a gay bar—and this woman says, What are you doing in our bathroom? You have your bathroom over there. She says, I'm a woman, with her deep voice because her hormones had changed and all that. And the woman literally grabs her. (laughs) She got a hold of that sock. I don't know what she thought but—(laughs) And she came out and she was so angry. She says, From now on you're taking me to the bathroom. (laughs)

00:42:55

ALBIN: That's really funny.

00:42:56

MILLER: Yeah it was hilarious. And she got to perform at a professional club we have up in Portland called Darcel's just on new talent night or whatever but—and she really enjoyed it. We didn't get into the court system or anything. We didn't have that kind of money. The royal sovereign courts and they're all—they're great organizations and all that but you got to have enough money to kind of support yourself and she had to work for a living and I worked for a lot of years.

00:43:37

ALBIN: So what was life like when you moved to Kansas?

00:43:42

MILLER: When we moved to Kansas we—I never—when I left in the seventies, I swore I'd never be in the Midwest again. But my daughter came out, my youngest, and she was very obviously having some mental issues and traumatized. She was going through a divorce and telling us things like he hit her and he hit the child and so God kind of let us know that he wanted us to move to Kansas. And so we came out in our RV and we literally bought this house, parked the RV out in the backyard while I fixed it up, lived in it through a January. That was a bad—(laughs) I forgot how cold it gets out here. We had a truck and of course one of the first things I did was put my rainbow sticker on it. I mean that's just always what I've done. I always have just that little strip. And one day I come out of the store and my windshield is broke—no brick, no bat, nothing there to think well something fell on it. It just all bashed in and so obviously somebody didn't like my sticker.

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00:45:03

ALBIN: So what year would that have been in?

00:45:04

MILLER: That would have been in '03. And so we kind of toned down and we took the stickers off the cars for a couple of years. But they're back on and I'm not going to let a few people stop me from educating people. One of the things I love the most is that First Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) allows me to get involved. And I give away food at our food bank. We have a Food, Loaves and Fishes where we feed people. And we feed everybody. We don't just feed the gay community.

Now here's the difference. Out on the west coast, the MCCs okay, great MCCs but where they focus their attention is in the AIDS community and the gay community and the—and that's where they go with it and that's good, but it doesn't get us outside of our box. This church gives food to everyone. So when these people come down into the basement of that building they don't know we're a gay church, even though we're not a gay church now. We're just gay-friendly church (laughs)—gay empowering or whatever they call it now. They don't know who we are. But as they learn who we are and they see us as human they can't have the same opinions as they did before.

This year we went out for national Coming Out Day. And there was a lady there that comes and gets food from us every month. And she says, Pat what are you here for? And so I says, Well we're trying to educate people and this is Coming Out Day and—well that's wrong. That's against Jesus. That's against the Bible. That's—and she hit me with such anger. I hadn't seen that kind of anger and force for so many years. I gave her all the good opinions and she just couldn't—couldn't, wouldn't hear them. And I finally said, Well just remember who feeds you every month. I know that wasn't probably the best politically correct thing to say but. And the next month she didn't show up and I thought, Well I'd lost her. And the month after that she came back. And it hasn't been an issue now. And I think that one of the neatest things I can get out of this MCC—plus we join things like, This is a—how long is temporary for the homeless shelter in Wichita? It's about seventeen years (laughs) they've had a temporary overflow homeless shelter.

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We get involved in a lot of justice issues. Not just—we're still here for the AIDS community and we're still here for our community, but we're also educating people on the outside of who we are. A lot of people come into our church, they like it, some stay, some don't, it's whatever. I like that idea that we're getting out there and teaching people. If I could I'd probably have little cards. In the old days we had cards that says, I am a card-carrying lesbian. Now we want you to know that you know someone who is not this or that or whatever but a real regular person. (laughs) And those are things we gave out to kind of be in your face. But I would. People who sit down and meet me find out who I am. They don't see me as gay. And it's hard because you try to find out who to vote for, who's good, but I can't say Pat is gay first. Pat is so many other things. I am so many things other than gay but I am gay too. And I know the new term is lesbian—men are gay and women are—in the old days, we didn't care. It was we were all together. It was not the separation between the men and the women that there is. Some things we've really lost.

One of the things that saddened me greatly was when my youngest daughter was killed. I had had her daughter and she had lived with me since we'd moved out here. It was the year 2006 when I finally took my granddaughter in and I got her some counseling for her mothers' death. I mean she was five. Through this, that and the other the father—after having her for a year and the father just kind of going (makes noise), he takes her back and I'm thinking, Oh great he's finally going to be a dad, and he gives her to his sister who allows me no contact, none. So here this child I raised out here for two-and-a-half years okay I can no longer write, call, see, anything. And I have no rights, not one. Even though the court saw fit to let me be Kristin's mother when she was four, I can't be Violet's grandma. And that makes me mad. And I called some places and what I was told is, Wow that's really terrible and if you were out here on the west coast we would fight for you. In Kansas you don't have a snowball's chance in Hades.

00:51:22

ALBIN: So do you think the chances of something like that being won in Oregon is a possibility?

00:51:28

MILLER: Yeah well I talked to—and I can't remember which legal project. They were out of San Diego. And they actually said—they says, Oh yeah if you were out here,

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they said, We're sure we could probably win that for you, especially since I've had the mom since she was four (laughs) and the granddaughter had been living with me with the mother—my daughter and my granddaughter were living with us when we moved out here. And the father just wanted to play video games. He's not a bad person, he just wasn't quite a grownup yet. And he swore to me he'd never take her away and of course now he has and it's very hurtful. And—she's very special.

Of course all my grandkids are special and I love them all dearly. Some know me as Pat but they don't know who I am. I've tried to explain but the oldest girl just, she made me promise not to tell her kids that I was her grandmother's lesbian lover. (laughs) And I try to respect that because I'm not the parent and like I said, I did a lot of things my mother didn't approve of. So I'm trying to let my kids have their own life. But it's also hurtful. I have all their pictures up on the walls and some I get to see and some I don't, and some pictures are three, four, five years old.

There was a time that everybody was happy and then when Kristin died it's like death in my family makes everybody mad at me. And I think it's because no matter what they could always count on me. If they ever had a need or something terrible happened I would always be there to save them when they were kids—all of them, and even when they were grownups. They needed money, somehow I'd always come up with something or however you bail out your kids. And they're still just—the trauma of losing a sibling is terrible. And it's been a couple years now. So—but the ones I get to see are fantastic.

00:54:11

ALBIN: I'm going to just change the tape.

00:54:12

MILLER: Sure, go ahead.

(pause)

(camera conversation)

(pause)

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01:00:37

MILLER: Go ahead because—

01:00:39

ALBIN: Okay we're on.

01:00:40

MILLER: I think this is one of my big things that I always try to tell people is every time the media wants to show gay people it's like they turn on one of those parades in San Francisco. And I want you to know personally I have never walked bare cheeked down a public street in a parade, okay? I think there's a lot of things I've never done—never walked bare cheeked anywhere other than in my house. But the guys feel good enough about their bodies, they want to go show all that. I'm not too impressed with it but I can live with it. One of the things that really got me angry was I came to the first Pride here which I believe—that I was here for, was in '04 and there was a person up on the—doing the announcement who had the "F" word about every second to third word. I am so glad I did not take my four-year-old granddaughter to that. She didn't need to hear that kind of language.

And I'm a believer that if you don't like something you fix it, so that's when I went to try to volunteer for Pride. Next year those people didn't really want help but I've helped in the last two years. And now I'm one of the vice presidents on the board, because I've always been a believer that if you don't like it fix it. Don't sit there and complain to me and then say, Oh well I don't have time or I just don't know what I'm doing. I get all these people who say, Well I don't want to buy a five-dollar button to go into Pride. Then help me find sponsors. Help me. I mean, here—there was this young bartender. Oh he got all upset about buying a five-dollar ticket. It's like, You know the connections with the alcohol people. Help me find sponsors. Oh I don't have time for that. And it's like—you've got to be the fixer of the problem.

Too many of our young people are very content with what they have and us old farts have finally kind of said, Well we're kind of close enough. But it's really some of the older people who are still out there fighting—Bruce, myself, Ken is the president. He's not a spring chicken. And we're waiting for the young people to grab the torch and go,

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Yes, let's go, let's be able to get married, let's be able—Washington they just signed some papers so that they can have—all the weird stuff about when one partner has a child they both have some custody rights and some other things, because it's very hard.

I was with a woman for seven years. I jumped—when my partner was killed I jumped into a relationship immediately and that's (laughs) not the best choice. And I put up with it for about seven years. But for seven years her children were my children, and they were grown so that wasn't an issue but her granddaughter was three or four and she was raised with me as her other grandma. Well then when we split up, I don't get to write her, send her birthday cards, nothing and it's just—it's hurtful. I have an entire photo album of photos of her growing up from five to whatever she was, twelve or something like that when we split up and she'll never get to see them or have them. I've tried to contact them and say, Hey give me an address and I'll send them to you. And they're just like, No. No. And it's like—it's an amazing—I don't understand. I think that—I—well I know. I still love everyone I've ever been with. It just doesn't mean I can't live with them, but I still love them on a personal level. And whenever we start tying things up more, okay, being more married than just, Oh we did it in the church or we did it at home, maybe then people will start taking themselves more seriously and that means the public will start taking us more seriously.

I knew this couple that had a very large church wedding and a year-and-a-half later one just disappears one day. I mean she literally just disappears and then calls a few days later and says, Oh well I'm not going to come home, I'm tired of you. And the other one didn't even know there was a problem. But she had no respect for her commitment. I took a commitment five years ago in that this five years my partner has gone from a working, reasonably healthy woman to a woman who's on constant oxygen, who needs quite a bit of care, who has no feeling up to her knees in her legs, her diabetes is out of control. I mean there's a whole bunch of stuff. She has COPD. I feel more nurse than partner sometimes but my commitment is there. I took a commitment. Sometimes I may not be the happiest person in the world. You get tired. (laughs) I mean, I'm disabled myself. And now she's disabled and it's kind of hard getting the house clean and fixing it up and the other things you have to do. But I took a commitment. And my neighbors and my church and all the people who know us I think respect me at least for that commitment. And when we have people that make these commitments and then

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just throw them away how can—how can society take them seriously? How can they take them seriously until we start taking ourselves seriously. We don't just jump in and out of beds. If you want to have an open relationship that's fine. Say it's an open relationship and be that. But it's none of this, Oh I'm just not coming home. (laughs)

01:07:36

ALBIN: So how did you meet Colleen?

01:07:37

MILLER: It was the funniest thing. I was never a church person—very spiritual, did not like organized religion. I was raised Catholic, does that help you any? (laughs) I call myself a recovering Catholic. When I had—I actually had a mental breakdown is how I decided that other relationship was not going to make it. (laughs) It takes a lot. I am pretty stubborn. And I had a computer business out of my home. We were the second largest computer company in Salem, Oregon. I came home, I was trying to get myself together. People had come in getting their computers—oh Pat you ought to come to MCC. And I pretty much knew everybody there. I'd been in Salem for over twenty years, in Oregon for thirty. (laughs) And I says, Yeah I'll come one of these days. It took me two months to finally get up the nerve to go. And my first wife had always wanted me to go to church with her and I never would, I just couldn't. So the first time I went to an MCC it was up in Portland. And all I did was bawl there because she had wanted me to go so many years to that church and I just never could and now she was dead and uh—and I'm not a crier. (laughs) But—oh I picked up myself and I went to Salem MCC. And I walk in and they're all like, Oh Pat you finally made it. Oh good to see you Pat.

Everybody—pretty much everybody knew me. There was—maybe out of twenty-five there was maybe three or four that didn't know me and Colleen was one of them. We met and we were friendly. And I actually had rented a room to a woman, and that woman and Colleen started dating and Colleen moved in with her. And I—she and I were best friends. I mean, I could talk to her about anything and—relationships and feelings and everything. When the woman decided to move out that was renting the room I just told Colleen to stay in the room, that's fine. And everybody kept on saying, Well you guys ought to get together. You guys ought to get together. It's like, No, no we're just best friends. We're best friends. And one night we had friends who said oh

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they were going to get married. This was going to be the time they announce it at the bar and all that, that they're going to get married, a couple guys. So we went to the bar and I took her as a date. And it was like, I don't know duh. (laughs) This is really a cool woman that has a lot of strength, inner strength. People who talk like me all the time like the quiet ones. She's quiet and reserved and—you always try to seek out what you don't have in yourself so she's all the things I'm not. She's pretty good with books and book smart and quiet and very—has a lot of faith in God and the whole bit.

I still struggle with a Christian God. (laughs) Native American God I can deal with, Christian has been hard. I kid people about culture shock, going back to my birth parents. Culture shock was I was raised German and Polish by my adopted parents and when I met my birth parents, my father is an Indian. We call them Native American out in the west coast, that's the proper name. And there's no questioning he's Native American. I mean, there's just nothing. And he's very dark skinned. And I says, So pop what kind of Indian are you? And he says, Well I don't know my father and so we don't know what tribe we're from. And I says, Well mom what am I from your side? And she says, You're Texan. And I said, I'm Texan? She says, Daddy says Texan is all we are and that's all we ever have to be. (laughs) So I'm Indian and Texan. And so that started a lot of searching for the culture of the Native American.

And I'm very comfortable—I was very fortunate. I did like a vision—a modern-day vision quest after my first wife died. And I got on a little 500 cc motorcycle, okay. It had a little fairing but no bags, no nothing. I took a couple of just cloth purse bags and I tied them together and those were my side bags. I took three days of clothes, a bedroll and a tent, and I headed for South Dakota from Oregon, and all the back roads because it wasn't—the idea wasn't to go fifty or seventy, it was—well it was to go fifty. And I took all the side streets and all the back roads, anything that looked interesting I took. It was a beautiful journey.

Pine Ridge Indian Reservation has a week down where they actually invite all peoples to come in and learn about them, and it was a whole fifteen dollars for a whole week. (laughs) It was amazing. And it was so cool because I had just got—I mean I had just lost my whole world, okay and I was now trying to check into this Native American stuff and all this. And I was talking to the medicine man one day. And I says, Well you don't

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have an issue because I'm gay? And he goes, Yeah what about it? Duh. That tribe anyhow had absolutely no care. That's the way the Great Spirit made you. That's the way you were made. What's your issue about it? What's your issue about it? And once there was not any pressure—nobody worried about if I was going to hurt their children or whatever. I had so much fun because they had ice cream cones for like twenty-five cents or fifty cents. And there were eight or ten kids were always running around so every day at two o'clock we'd go over in the heat, I'd buy ice cream cones for everybody. Cost me three dollars or something like that. And those kids just thought I was the be-all and end-all of the whole world. I could afford ice cream every day. I think it was twenty-five cents. And it was like, That was fun. And nobody had an issue.

And then the other thing that I learned, which was another fascinating thing about being a female—because all these years I'm really not that comfortable being female. I'm somewhere in between. And this is the Lakota Nation and so their traditions at least are theirs for right there. And I says—they're trying to play the drum. I says, This is what I always wanted to do, I've always wanted to play the drum. Medicine man says, You can't play that drum. And immediately I get mad because, Why can't I? I'm a female but I'm just as good as any man and let me show you and all that. I even got a job that way one time. I told the boss, I said, You pick out your best man out here and I'll outnail him. I didn't have to prove it; just kind of the cockiness of saying it got me the job. But he's like, No, no, no, no. He says, You don't understand. He said, When God—God made man and then God made woman. And he gave woman the power of life, he says. And that is like a God thing. And then he looked back on man and he thought, What a poor pitiful creature I had made because he's really kind of disconnected from God. Woman has the power of life and so she is already connected to God. And so God gave man the drum and tobacco to carry his prayers to God and woman's power of life would overpower the drum. And that's why women for the Lakota Nation are not allowed to drum. And it was like, Oh it's because women are better than men. (laughs) And it's like, Oh that was a whole thing to wrap your mind around too. .

But yeah—and back to Colleen, we've—most of her illnesses have developed out here. I mean they've kind of culminated to a head. She's sixty and she has a hard issue with that because she looks at people and she goes, I don't look like that do I? No you don't look like that honey. (laughs) And I'm turning fifty this year and I'm going, Wow fifty.

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What's—I was just twenty-seven the other day wasn't I? And then I can remember being thirty five. But it all starts going so quickly after a while and you sit there and you do start kind of going and saying, Well what have I done with my life? What has—what has changed? What have I had a hand in changing? And it's kind of interesting to see the things that I've done or at least had a hand in and worry about the young people and saying, You guys, you got the energy, I don't anymore. I have some of that knowledge, but I need some of that enthusiasm, that zest for life. You get about fifty, you kind of go, Well whatever. It's okay. Everything will work out in the end. But we need some of that fight and that drive to sit and say, We want to get things changed. We want to have a better life, we want to have an equal life, whatever it is you want to say. And that's kind of what I hope to help with is to help young people do some of that realizing that we've still got a ways to go. And it's not just gay people but anybody we've got ways.

01:19:40

ALBIN: So since you've lived here, 2003—

01:19:44

MILLER: Um-hm—

01:19:45

ALBIN: —to now, have you seen any changes on any level, either state or in Wichita or anywhere in Kansas, in terms of gay and lesbian rights?

01:19:56

MILLER: I don't think so. I think personally I'm still out there. I—like I said, I took the rainbows off and then I decided I'm going to put them on. I'm going to fight anybody that does. I haven't really had anybody come up to me and get in my face. But I still don't—I don't feel that Colleen will be protected. My family tends to die young, fifty, sixty. Colleen's family tends to live to be nineties. I worry about what's going to happen to her. We have no old age home for gay people. We have not respite cares or anything. I'm her caregiver as well as her partner. If I should pass on before her I don't know who's going to take care of her. And I guess she can pass for straight but it'd just be nice if we had our own. I'd like to see assurances.

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One of the things that happened to me was we had—Juanita and I, my first partner, we had our cars together, we bought a house together, we bought all kinds of stuff. Actually it was a mobile home on a piece of land. And we had done this all after the kids had left home and some of the kids hadn't even ever been to the trailer that—the trailer home we lived in. And of course we bought our car insurance together and everything. So when she had this car accident and she was killed in the car, and of course the car was totaled, they paid me off on the car really quick, said, Okay we're going to get this done so that the big money will come because she had a policy that doubled because she had her seatbelt on. Oh yeah just take—we know that we're low-balling you on the car but it'll make it easier for us to get through the ten thousand dollar insurance. And that insurance guy, not my agent who was very okay with us being gay, but her boss—one of the underwriters or whatever you call them—actually called out to Kansas, called the oldest daughter who had been abused by her father all these years because her mother was a lesbian, and she really thought that her mother had abused her because, If mom had just not been that way he wouldn't have ever said anything so mom should have not been that way. (laughs) He actually called her and says, You guys know this money is yours. This money is yours. Well when they told me—the insurance premiums that I had paid all these years, now the benefits were going to go to the kids and not even to me, I was—oh I was—oh I was mad. (laughs) There was no easy way to say it.

01:23:24

ALBIN: And this happened in Oregon?

01:23:25

MILLER: This happened in Oregon. So I went to a lawyer and he says, You have got no case. He said, They're going to get it. He says, But remember they also get half the bills. Because I mean it was just instinct for me that it was, I paid the premiums, I get the money, I pay the bills. Simple. And everything is mine because we'd had it—we thought we had it written up. Well it ended up that the mobile home was mine but the land was half theirs because it wasn't written up properly. And they got the ten thousand dollars but I gave them half of all the bills. And I had told the kids. I says, Look you guys just let me get the money, I'll pay the bills, I'll take care of everything, I'll give you all a thousand dollars each. No they didn't want that. They wanted all the

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money. So I says, Okay fine. I gave them the money, gave them the bills. By the time the lawyers got through with them they ended up with \$340 each.

And about six months to a year later the three that we raised were calling up to me and saying, I'm sorry. And the oldest daughter whipped us up into thinking this stuff, we didn't really want to—I'd also given her half of, of course, the mortgage. So they signed off on the mortgage right away and so I had—I ended up with my land and my home. And I worry here, okay. We have this house. It needs to be fixed up. I'm doing that as I can, like I said with—with being disabled I try to find young people to come in and help me at a reduced rate. They do the physical work and I do the mental work. The cabinets go together this way. Okay hold them and I'll put the screw gun to them. (laughs) But I worry about what's going to happen to her if things aren't written up just right. Is the house going to properly transfer over to her? And it's not a problem if you have lawyers and spend six hundred dollars and put things in a trust and all this other stuff. But we don't have that kind of money. We're both living on disability. So we're trying to figure out how do you set things up. Whereas if we were just married it would be just married, okay. And we are married. We're married under the sight of God, we have a marriage certificate, at least from the church, all these things. I've even got a videotape and pictures. So no one can discount that we're married and yet legally it doesn't—it isn't worth the tape and paper it's on and that's very worrisome.

Whereas in Oregon I feel like maybe—because Juanita died in '95 so that's what now, seventeen—twelve years ago, excuse me. Maybe things have gotten better out there. I know they have in Washington. They just—like I said, they just signed that paperwork I saw on the news. But yeah I worry a lot. And cars and—unless you get really a gay lawyer, you can't really trust them to write that stuff up right. Because we had had—when we wrote up the paperwork for the Oregon house Juanita and I told the person who wrote up the paperwork, which was just a real estate, to write it up so that if one died it would automatically go to the other one. Well the trailer did but the land didn't. So what other loophole can people find out here? Colleen's oldest daughter, we have—fortunate because she's gay, and so I pretty much know that if for some reason Colleen should die first I'm not going to have issue with the oldest daughter. The second child, he's kind of distant but the youngest one I absolutely expect to have all kinds of grief from him.

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01:27:58

ALBIN: And why do you think that is?

01:28:01

MILLER: He's still got this thing that his mom owes him something because he didn't have a perfect childhood. So I expect that he would try to sue me for the house or any property, which I would gladly— She's got her grandmother's china which absolutely is going to go to the kid—her oldest daughter and if she wants to pass it down to the little brother that's fine, that's their family thing. But it's—right now my kids are mad at me and they don't claim me, but I claim them so—I don't care. Oh, I do care but I can't do anything about it if they don't claim me. But I have six books of pictures. I have a wall full of pictures. I have three 16 x 20 portraits of the kids, all their growing up years and I don't know what's going to happen to those. They send their uncle over and he says, Well they kind of feel like you've hijacked all their stuff. I said, All they have to do is come over and ask for it, but they won't. And— But I do worry.

There was a museum in Portland about gay and lesbian history. And they had asked me for some pictures and I'm going to send them that big 16 x 20, because that was who we were—that was taken like six months after the custody battle. That was—the children we won custody of. (laughs) I don't mean to be egotistical and think of myself as in a—like in a history book or something—oh I made history. In church we have this class called, Creating a Life that Matters. And there's this whole section on saints. Who do you consider a saint? And they had Harvey Milk down as a saint. Now I didn't know Harvey but Harvey was just a gay guy who got to be on the city council in San Francisco and he got shot. Now some people feel it was about being gay and some people feel it was about his rival. I don't care but I didn't see him like heal people or go out and make any big legislation or anything. I can't see him as a saint, I'm sorry. It's not that he didn't do fantastic things but I've done those. I've done probably as many things as he did and I don't consider myself a saint. (laughs)

I don't even know that—I feel like just a regular person, not anybody special. We fought for our rights because we are who we are. If that's handed down to young people that's fantastic. I think that's great but it wasn't just for posterity that I did it. I did it because I wanted my kids—my children—to have an easier life in school and not be made fun of.

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I wanted to be able to know that if I'm in the hospital my wife, whoever that is, can go tell the doctor to do this or to do that and the doctor doesn't have to have special pieces of paper that say, Oh yeah she's okay to do this. It should be enough to say, This is my wife. I can't do that in the medical profession here in Kansas. I could in Oregon, I can't here. We've tried it and we've gotten some backlash from it. So now we're sisters. (laughs) But Midwest always changes slower than the coast, that's a fact. But I'm still confident change will come, it'll just take a little time.

01:32:33

ALBIN: Do you think that—you arrived in Kansas in 2003, right?

01:32:39

MILLER: Um-hm.

01:32:40

ALBIN: Do you think you'll go back to Oregon or you're going to stay here?

01:32:43

MILLER: No this is where we'll end. My grandchildren are here and in time I pray that all of them will seek out me. The one that was taken away I believe that she'll come back and she'll need to know why and who her mother was, because her mother died when she was five. And I don't want other people to give her distorted ideas of my daughter. My daughter was good and bad like every person, made good choices and made bad choices. I hope that the older children—the older of the grandchildren, will someday go, I met that woman and I know somehow she's connected to my grandma and I really would like to know something about my grandma. And I hope then I can pass on the videotape of their grandma walking on the—in the sands of the beach, which she loved and all and maybe pass down some history because in a relationship you always swap stories and be able to tell the stories that she told of her great grandparents and things like that to the grandkids. So we're here and we're ready to make it a better place as much as we can.

01:34:19

ALBIN: Do you think you can lead a fulfilling life here?

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01:34:23

MILLER: I think I can and I think we can because we're older. I'm not sure young people really get everything they deserve yet. We're older, we're kind of set in our ways, we're more relaxed. It's—the neighborhood—I was really amazed the neighborhood's fine with us. They didn't ask, we didn't tell. The one neighbor kind of understands. We walk in—we've been going to QT [Quick Trip] to get coffee for the last couple of weeks, we've been busy at the church every morning. Little—I say little girls but she's probably twenty, twenty-five. It's something that just kind of comes when you start realizing you're half a century. The young lady, she just pops up and she says, So how long you guys been together? And that was kind of neat that it was just a very common question—How long you guys—oh we've only been together five years or six years. But it was cool that it was just, oh yeah whatever.

I think—one of the things that upsets me the most about continuing in Kansas is we have friends at church who—two women. And one woman has a niece who made some poor choices and had a baby at fifteen. (laughs) And they took the girl in and they took care of her and when she had the baby they took care of the baby and her, and they enabled her to go back to school where her mother was not a positive home for her to continue her education or anything. And the girl got involved in gangs. And so they told her, they said, No gangs. And so they reported her to the youth people. And they put the girl in whatever kind of juvie—intervention juvie. And then the girl's mad and angry at her aunts and she makes accusations of child abuse so the baby is taken away. We were the baby's babysitter while she was in school because the school's right down the street. And they come with police to actually rip the baby out of Colleen's arms. And the baby was three months old. So the baby has bounced around now through a couple of different foster homes for six months. Then she goes back to the aunts.

Now they're trying to integrate it back with the mother who's now oh all of what sixteen-and-a-half and working part-time at Dillons and—that baby isn't going to have a chance. That baby is not—the mother is—she's not ready. Even if she thinks she's ready, at sixteen-and-a-half, seventeen, you are not ready to be a full-time mom I'm sorry. And only—if you're married or you have a family that supports you—but all on your own working part time at Dillons, don't even have your GED. Welfare's going to set her up in

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a house and all this stuff. These two aunts have been trying to adopt children. They can't adopt any children. Now they've got their, I don't know, second niece. I don't know how you—what relationship the baby is, if she's the aunt, whatever. That baby's just not going to have a real chance in this world and the reason is because the aunts are gay? It's not right. They lead them on. They say, Well yeah it probably looks like you can adopt. No, you're not going to adopt. We need to get parental rights, people rights, to be able to have foster children.

I have two beautiful foster boys' pictures up there that when they brought the two boys to me one was three and one was eighteen months. And the three-year-old is full alcohol syndrome. He has the almond-shaped eyes and the retardation that comes with it. They said, He's noncommunicative. I said, Noncommunicative? What does that mean? She says, He doesn't talk. They bring him at 9:30 at night. And I said, Have these children had anything for dinner? And they go, I don't know. So I get out the milk and I pour the milk for the eighteen-month-old because at eighteen months you just get it. But the three-year-old I wanted him to start having some sense of having his own control. So I said, Levi would you like some milk? And he looked sternly at me and he said, No. And so I went to put the milk away and he goes. (makes noise) And we did this a few times. And I realized the next morning that he didn't know the word yes. So we started working with—I poured him a glass—Would you like a glass of milk? Yes. And I'd give it to him. Three days—three days, he knew the difference between yes and no, okay?

Within five months—now, we didn't make him do anything but we talked to him. And I tend to like music so I always had the music going and I'm singing to it and whatever. One day I hear him singing in the backseat to the music. I went out and bought that tape, back when we had cassette tapes. (laughs) And within five months—one night we have beans for dinner. He pushes away his dinner and he says, I don't want this. (laughs) I says, Baby you've said your first full sentence. You don't have to eat it. I made him macaroni and cheese. But if people have time for those kids, okay. Now we only had those boys for five months because my partner was killed and I just—I fell apart. What should it matter if they're gay or not? What honestly should it matter?

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Neither one of those boys were potty-trained. Again, I come from an older generation of teaching. They were terrified of being alone. You could not leave them alone. So when I'd go in the bathroom I'd leave the door open. They'd come in, they'd look and go, Okay, and they'd leave. Well eventually they got to the point—I found Levi trying to climb up on the toilet one day. So I get him a little potty seat. When I'm in there going to the bathroom he comes in and he sits and he does his thing. It was the simplest potty training there was. I know every kid's different, just like every parent is different, but it doesn't—I wish I could get it in these educated people's heads that it does not matter if there's love, it's love. It does not matter if it's two females, two males, two gorillas. I don't do interspecies but whatever. (laughs) I'm a little—there's a couple of things I'm still against, okay—interspecies and man-boy love society, forget it, (laughs) can't do it. (laughs) But that's—they've got to start learning it just doesn't matter, people are people.

01:42:36

ALBIN: Have you had experiences in Wichita that kind of cause you to go, Oh yeah, fighting for it was worth it, like being political?

01:42:48

MILLER: Yeah. I think that just that lady coming to the food bank, just being there on that Coming Out Day and teaching that one woman that it isn't against God's law, okay? There is no place in the Bible that it says, Do not be homosexual. Most of that stuff came from Nero, actually when people quote—I did a big report one time on it in college, and a lot of that stuff comes from the Book of Nero. But who wants to believe a guy who plays a violin while his city is burning? How much credit should we give him? The Bible does not say—the most it does say is a man shall not lay with another man. So I guess that means women are okay, right? I mean because if you're going to be literal let's be literal but if you're not—a lot of people say, Well that's what they quote but then they say, Oh but it applies to women too. And it's like, Wait a minute. Is it word for word or is it meaning? Which is it, because you can't have it both ways. And much more educated people than I can explain all that stuff out. But I think the fact that I don't see a lot of turn-or-burn people in Kansas thrills me. (laughs)

01:44:17

ALBIN: Okay so—

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01:44:18

MILLER: I really kind of thought when we were moving back here that we were going to hit some of those turn-to-God-or-burn-in-hell people. The worst one we got is that guy at Spirit One Church, which should really get a hint when God sent lightning and hit his church—maybe we're not doing something right here. Fred—Fred Phelps?

01:44:46

ALBIN: Yeah, Topeka.

01:44:47

MILLER: That's him. There's one here and I cannot—he's suing the city now. The city—we had a proper permit for Pride. He actually came into Pride where we—it's a private party type thing. He didn't buy a button. He came in. He was giving out his literature, trying to preach his word. And that's okay for him to have his opinion. No problem with that. But if I'm having a private party I don't think that you should come in and tell me things I don't necessarily want to hear. When the police officer asked him to go several times he didn't. They put him in the car and they took him, they arrested him. Now he's suing the city for something. And the worst part is we had lots of people there, we know exactly what happened. And what he claims in his lawsuit isn't even close and yet somehow somebody still has to decide if he's credible and did this really happen and did we pick on him and all that stuff? I hate people who lie. I just hate it. If you've made a mistake or something like that, just be—fess up.

01:46:09

ALBIN: Well I'm going to—I'll change the tape at this point.

(pause)

01:46:14

ALBIN: We okay? Do we need like a little outdoor break because (unintelligible)?

01:46:17

MILLER: No I think we're okay.

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01:46:20

ALBIN: Hi Lucky. What's your story? Tell me your story Lucky.

01:46:25

MILLER: Lucky ran across a street one day in front of me as I was turning a corner, and he was very lucky I didn't hit him.

01:46:34

ALBIN: (laughs) Lucky was lucky.

01:46:36

MILLER: And so I picked him up and took him home and—because he was right around the corner from me. I put him in—I put him in the paper, ad said, Found Pomeranian. Nobody claimed him and so we kept him but he kept the name Lucky because he was lucky I didn't hit him. (laughs)

01:46:57

ALBIN: He's very lucky. He's very lucky. (unintelligible).

01:47:17

MILLER: I got an answer to one of your questions.

01:47:19

ALBIN: Okay.

01:47:20

MILLER: What do I see that says it's all worth it? On Coming Out Day there was a group of very young people called—kids from East High School called a GSA [Gay-Straight Alliance]. I don't even know what it exactly—

01:47:33

ALBIN: Gay-Straight Alliance.

01:47:34

MILLER: Gay-Straight Alliance. It was fantastic. They said they'll have like a group of thirty kids in high school. Yes. It was definitely—everything was worth it and I'll do ten

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times more. Because you know how hard—it's horrible in middle school and high school and you're trying so hard to fit in anyhow. And if you're a kid like me that—I was heavy, I'm not necessarily pretty, I didn't really like boys. I rode a motorcycle to school. (laughs) I mean—gas was all of thirty-seven cents a gallon but I could go a long way on a dime. (laughs) So I rode a motorcycle to school. It was a dirt bike and—I've never been to a school dance, I just never have. I just never could fit into that model. And to know now that there are young high school people that are okay to dance girl-with-girl and boy-with-boy. I know they said boys are still having a lot of problems but they're okay with the lesbian girls, which kind of goes back to that old thought of, Well if she just met a good man she would change. But somehow men being gay it means that they're not manly, which again goes back to that Nero if you didn't know it because he said that a soldier should not ever like prostitute himself to another man because then that makes a quality in him of submission if a man submits to another man and that makes him not a good soldier. It's weird. But yeah seeing the GSA kids, ah, that's fantastic.

01:49:42

ALBIN: So why do you think that—you're talking about the need for enthusiasm from the younger folks to kind of motivate you. Why do you think younger generations of GLBT folks aren't that motivated?

01:50:00

MILLER: I think all the young people aren't that motivated. I can't see this generation burning their bras or trying to fight for an ERA [Equal Rights Amendment] or saying that women have a right—I mean, look—we—I have worked as a carpenter in 1979. I know there were women that worked in nontraditional jobs before me and yet still we don't have equal pay for like executives and women where they—I don't exactly understand how they negotiate their pay but—they're complacent for some reason. I don't know. I wish I did know what was different about these generations. Sometimes I worry that it's because everybody needs to be socially acceptable—that now we take mood stabilizers. If we get a little intense people call us aggressive, just because we can get intense about a belief and something. And of course that's not socially acceptable anymore to raise your voice because Lord knows then you could be scaring somebody and—and so—I don't exactly know what's caused it but I sure know that somehow we need to change it—for everyone, not just the GLBT people. It's got to be all people.

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Maybe we do have too easy of a life. We put our dishes in a machine to wash and we drive everywhere and everything's given. Things that used to be pie in the sky are just everyday stuff. I can remember saving a lot of money for my DVD surround sound and it was—it was a good chunk of change. Now you can buy a DVD player for thirty dollars and you sit there and go, huh? (laughs) And everybody buys stuff new and it's all disposable. I hate our disposable society, okay? Cameras you throw away, TVs you throw away. You don't recycle them even out in Kansas. That's another thing that drives me nuts. They don't recycle out here. (laughs) We don't have enough natural materials left that we can continue to rape this land and not try to put something back. You can't always take, take, take. It just doesn't work. And I don't know. I wish I did.

01:52:59

ALBIN: Could you tell me the story again that you told me about when you went to buy your wedding band?

01:53:04

MILLER: Oh yeah. I went into a high-end jewelry store to buy my partner a ring. And I was—I was just amazed because when my first partner and I had gone to buy wedding bands we bought matching turquoise bands and it was kind of in what we called a head shop in those days. (laughs) And even then I think we still said we were sisters—this was 1978—or we're best friends or something like that and then that was okay. And of course we were together for sixteen years. And then when I met another person it was about 2000, 2001, a few years. (laughs) And I walk into this high-end jewelry store and I'm kind of tense and I'm going, Well I want to buy a ring for my partner. And she says, Oh well we have all these beautiful rings. What does she like? And it was like—it was so natural and so normal I went, Oh this is cool.

01:54:19

ALBIN: And that was in Oregon?

01:54:20

MILLER: That was in Oregon. Although I think that for the most part you could do that out here, probably not at Dillons. People give me that look at Dillons every time we go in there, but I think at Sears or some of the higher-end jewelry stores like in the mall. I think it would be okay now. And that's—like, Wow that's so cool. It's so cool that you

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don't have to hide. You don't have to try to make excuses of who you are or what you're doing. And Kansas is coming along.

01:55:05

ALBIN: When we started the interview you talked a—you had mentioned that you knew you were just gay right from the get-go so what—What was it like your childhood and then in high school? I mean you mentioned a little bit about high school.

01:55:20

MILLER: High school was hell because I was in St. Louis at the time and because I've never been small and petite. I'm short but I'm not small and petite. There were never any clothes for me. And even when I was in sixth grade and my mother put me in a dress I just felt like a fish out of water. You feel like somebody's put you in a bunny suit or something and then put you out at Easter time and you just don't know what you're expected to do. That was the last dress I ever wore except I did wear my first wife's dress one time in Job Corps to make everybody laugh. But other than that, I've never wore a dress. I have offered to put on a dress and makeup if it would raise money for the church.

There was a couple of us kind of were dyky gals that (laughs) were trying to think of fundraisers, anything to make money, either for Pride or for the churches, one of those things that you're always thinking about, which is kind of sad because we have all these pictures down in the basement of the church of all these activities that guys and gals went to the skating parties and they did this and they did that. And the church, I got to tell you, the church here is an amazing building, okay? It is absolutely nothing compared to Salem MCC which is twenty-five people and they rent the American Legion hall on Sunday mornings for four hours and barely make enough money to cover that. But it's not being able to be taken care of like it used to because people aren't giving. And we kind of looked around at different churches. And I think that it's great in a way that there's other churches that are affirming. But I question really how affirming they are.

We went for a while—we went over to College Hill Methodist. Big gay community there at the later service, not the early service but the ten, eleven o'clock one. Lots of gay and lesbians there, lot of lesbians. And it was very friendly, okay, very nice, all that. But

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I had some issues with God. (laughs) And I went to the preacher one day and it was a woman named Ann and I said, Why is God mad at me? God has taken away—I mean we moved here because we thought God really wanted us to. And then all of a sudden we're broke, Colleen's sick, but she makes \$360 so she can't get any kind of medical insurance in Kansas. So we're having to try to do all her diabetic pills, everything, out of our pocket. I'm the only one that had an income at the time, she wasn't disabled yet. Were just—and I'm going, Why is God so mad at me? Why is he punishing me? Why? And you know what that preacher tells me? Now this is a very gay affirming church. She says, Well look the fact is is Colleen has family and if you can't handle her medical needs you can always send her back to her family.

Now I want to know if she'd have told a man and a woman that, and I know she wouldn't have, okay? But she did us. So even though she's very nice and yeah, it's okay to be gay, she didn't really, really see it as a marriage, not really, not as—yeah. And it just—that's when I quit that church. I said, I'm done. (laughs) I'm going back to MCC and—where I know—I know (laughs) that they want us to stay together. I know that if I go to the preacher she's going to say—or he or she or whoever was a preacher at the time, is going to say, You have taken a vow before God. This is important. God's not punishing you. Whatever they're going to say. But it's not going to be, Send her back to her family because they'll take care of her. (laughs) And she's not really related to you anyhow. What's that about? So yeah.

02:00:12

ALBIN: So what was your childhood like?

02:00:14

MILLER: Ah childhood. I had a lot of weird things about my early years because we played cowboys and Indians a lot because that was the thing in the sixties, cowboys and Indians. I was the Indian, I had the gun and I won. I was also an only child so I was kind of self centered. (laughs) But there was never—I never played girly things and I always played with trucks even when apparently I was really little. My grandmother gave me dolls and they sat in the closet and all this. And when I told my mother that (laughs) I was gay I called her from Astoria, Oregon (laughs) to St. Louis and I said, Mom I'm gay. And she says, Oh Felix told me that I'd let you play with trucks too much. And I'm saying, Felix? And she says, Oh yeah the man who used to pump our gas. And

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so apparently this man would look into our station wagon and see me playing with trucks instead of dollies and told her that she should make me play with dollies or I was going to end up being weird. (laughs) You got me. But it took her a while to be okay with me being gay. It actually took her into—when I met Juanita and she suddenly had five grandchildren. And I called her up one day and I says, Ann asked me a question. I said, Ann came to me and said, So if you're kind of like our other mom, she says, does that mean your mom is like our grandma? And my mother said, Absolutely. Those are my grandkids. (laughs) And she never questioned me being gay after that, never.

She did question me being a carpenter though. She told me the story that one day she and the girls all at the telephone company were having lunch and they were all talking about the great things their daughters were doing—one was married and one was having a baby. And all she could do was just sit there quietly because she couldn't tell them about me. And then one day they were doing it again and they cornered her and they said, Helen you have a daughter don't you? And she says, Yeah. She says, Well what is she doing? She said, She's a carpenter and working on high-rise buildings in Portland, Oregon. And they all dropped their jaw and thought that was the most fantastic thing they had ever heard of. And all of a sudden then she was proud of me too. It was so important for her to blend in and be like the other girls. And that's a lot of what society is about, especially in middle school and high school.

And I had to learn at a very early age that I just wasn't going to and that had to be okay. That had to be okay. I mean, I was suicidal for years until I became gay and could look at myself in the mirror and say, It's okay. You're a good person. It's—one thing does not make you bad and certainly not loving someone and taking care of children and every—all that part that goes with it. Because I was adopted I think it made me more amenable to adopting children rather than per se having children. I was never very good with babies until I hit about forty (laughs), and that's a little late to be having them. That's definitely the grandma age. So that was okay with me. And like I said, They're my kids no matter what. They'll always be my kids and that's just a fact.

02:04:16

ALBIN: So you played trucks and cowboys and Indians? What else?

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02:04:18

MILLER: Oh yeah. Played baseball with the boys until the actual game—we played Little League. I got to practice on the field with the boys and everything until the game and then I had to leave. And that was hard because I was a good power hitter. And then they finally, when I was in sixth grade, had a girl's softball team and that was—(unintelligible) ball. I'm sorry. Colleen's daughter is forty this year and she played soccer and softball and it was okay to be gay in her high school, and I think that's great. But it was hard for us in the beginning because you were called names—lesbo, dyke, and I didn't even know what they were. But I knew I didn't want to be one, okay? And so it's hard. Year before last, the Pride committee here wanted to take back queer. They wanted to take that word back and make it okay. Well my wife is sixty and I got to tell you something, she could not get past the hurt, okay? She lived a straight life for many years. But even in her childhood she was called queer, okay? And it hurt her even to hear people use it like on ourselves and she couldn't ever get around it. Me, I can get around it. I understand that concept of taking it back and making it okay.

But yeah, high school was hard. I had one or two friends. And so of course, what do you do? You get into the drugs and then everybody loves you, especially if you have drugs. So I actually became a drug dealer, just to my little group, and maybe a few extras. But I dealt something called acid on white blotter. And everybody loved Pat because I could get in and out on my little motorcycle quick and I didn't charge them too much. And I lived at the party house for the last couple years. My mom remarried and I couldn't deal with her husband, I just couldn't. And—so when I hit Job Corps I had to get off drugs. And I played around for a few more years until—until it was okay, until I moved to the west coast and found out it was really okay to be a lesbo or a dyke, and really a dyke and a bulldyke was what I was and it was okay.

So yeah, I never went to a high school dance, never even tried, have always worn pants since the sixth grade. And it was nice because as a carpenter, especially union carpenter, you have to wear a hardhat. So it was very convenient for me to cut my hair short and just say, Oh I have to wear a hardhat. (laughs) Now in the summer I actually shave it, not down to the skin but real close and my grandkids like to—fuzzy head and all that. I really didn't think I was going to be able to in Kansas. And I can and I—and really people don't give me any grief about it at all and it's—that's really nice, because

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even in Oregon they would have given me grief because it's probably not politically correct or something (laughs) out there. Out here it's a lot easier to be heavy, it's a lot easier to be more of a T-shirt and jeans person. Oh and out here it's okay to sweat. On the west coast you're not allowed to sweat. Out here it actually gets hot enough that everybody sweats so I guess it's okay. (laughs) But yeah, I think the drugs saved me through high school, because if I was unhappy I'd just get high, and I don't think kids should have to live that way. All their life they should be okay with whatever they are—whether they got a missing arm or an extra nose or they're gay or they're straight, black or white or whatever. That's where I'd like to be when everybody's okay just to be who they are.

02:09:31

ALBIN: So is there anything else that I haven't asked you that you would like to add?

02:09:35

MILLER: Gosh I can't imagine what in the world I haven't talked about. (laughter)

02:09:40

ALBIN: Well if you can think of anything I can always come back.

02:09:45

MILLER: I think the hardest thing, the thing I'd like the most to see now, is definitely rights for especially the other parent and the other grandparent. I miss my baby, my Violet. I just—I've put her in God's hands and I know she's okay but I still miss her. Heck it's going on two years this summer. And—

02:10:17

ALBIN: Have you been involved with the Kansas Equality Coalition at all?

02:10:20

MILLER: Well kinda. One of the people there said, Oh yeah—because I told them, I says, Call me if there's something I can do or help with and I'll stand out on a street corner, I'll call people or I'll do— And she says, Well I'll send you the newsletter and all this. So I got the newsletter and I went to the website and it was really cool and I went in and it said, You're restricted from this area. Where's your dues? I'm sorry man, I'm

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just barely scraping by. I can't pay the dues. I told the lady this, Carol Murray, I can't pay the dues. I don't have that kind of money. Sorry. Wish I did. Really want to but at this point was fixing up the house and medical issues, just squeezing every penny. Nope, can't get in here, got to have dues. So no, I haven't been much involved with them.

02:11:20

ALBIN: Right, I was just wondering if they were doing anything with parental issues or if you had—

02:11:24

MILLER: Not to my knowledge. I think their big thing—I've worked with Tom Witt quite a bit, and I think their big thing was the anti-bullying thing, which was fantastic, I love it. That's the last thing I heard that they were doing. Of course now it's all the presidential stuff and try to figure out this one or that one when both of them have very good qualities (laughs) but who do you believe? One, I'd like the woman—I'd love a woman for president and I think she's probably got an in with some of the way the politics works. But I also like the enthusiasm and I love the fact that he's a person of color. Yeah, that's a tough one. I still haven't made up my mind, because they're both good on gay issues. I hear he's supposed to be a little bit better but I guess I worry about honesty. But she sure put up with a lot of shit I wouldn't have put up with. (laughs)

02:12:37

ALBIN: I've heard a lot of people say that. (laughs)

02:12:40

MILLER: And I don't know if that's good or bad. I mean she's staying true to her commitment that's good but is she doing it for political gain or for other reasons, I don't know. And while as much as I'd love to say I want somebody in there that's fresh and who's going to change the world, I also know that the good old boy system is still here and if there's somebody who's already got a foot in the door, they're going to have a little bit more abilities to work around that, You do this for me and I'll do that for you concept. So—and I think that's basically what they're into and yeah I talk about my grandparent rights. Right now the only two that I see are the two—and have any contact with are the two from the son who doesn't take care of his children. One has

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been adopted by another man and that's cool, he's got a good family, he's set, I know he's okay, but I give him—I'm there for more the extra family. Kids can't have enough family. And then my—his other daughter—(telephone ringing) Wife. I'm ready to come home. I'm her chauffeur. She's—her health issues have gotten to the point where she's not confident driving, even a mile, so—

02:14:20

ALBIN: And I understand that.

02:14:25

MILLER: And that's good to know your limitations.

02:14:25

ALBIN: So you see the other grandchild?

02:14:26

MILLER: I see my little granddaughter, Emma, and she's eight. And she's had some issues because her dad—in the day we didn't have a diagnosis because we didn't have those things. He's thirty-five this year and—but he would probably be attention deficit disorder, hyperactivity, da, da, da. And we chose to not medicate him because the only thing in that day was Ritalin period, end of discussion and we didn't want to make him a zombie. So we did it all with natural foods—took him off white flour, white sugar. We did—we controlled everything he ate and his environment and oh you just can't even imagine all the health food stuff I have (unintelligible). And she had a lot of his same issues but her mother was willing to put her in counseling at age four, okay? And so she's learned at a very early age to become articulate. And so even though she still has a lot of that problem with attention—the teacher's talking and she's off in la-la land, she's still managing to get her work done, she's managing to do all her work.

Her father is such a genius that he would do one problem and he'd want to—the teacher would give him eight math problems and he'd do one and he'd say, Here it is. And you'd say, No you have to do all eight. And he says, Well look, I showed her I knew how to do it. Why do I have to do it eight times? Unfortunately, that doesn't work in this society. You still have to do it eight times no matter what. Well he couldn't. And she's able to do it eight times, so that's really cool. And we sat down the other day and she

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just got very articulate with me and she was telling me how when daddy starts talking bad about grandma she just doesn't listen and she understands that daddy's mad at grandma and it's okay and it's not anything about her. I mean, she doesn't have to choose. Daddy may try to make her do something but grandma is not going to make her choose, grandma is not going to stress on her. She knows she is loved no matter what. And I've been thrilled to be able to give that to her. I was thrilled to be able to have her enough here when her dad wasn't paying child support. What I did was I was her babysitter so her mom didn't have to pay out for babysitting. And I'd take her to school—I've taken her to school and picked her up for the last three, four years whatever time I've been here. And I've had that—I've instilled that love of reading. Her mother did too, but she loves to read. She just loves to read. She'd rather read than play a videogame, and that's cool. (laughs) And she's very articulate. And she was just telling me stuff the other day I was just so tickled, I'm thrilled. (laughs)

And the other boy that I get to see that's been adopted he's super beautiful, artistic drawings. He's reasonably articulate and he's seven, doing well in school and I'm just thrilled with that. And worry a little about the older grandchildren, especially the grandchildren in Qatar. I want them to know that they are all Americans except I think one which I don't know if she is an American or not because she was actually born there but all the rest were born here. So they're all Americans. I want them to know—I pray that they know someday that they can come here and if they are different they can still have a life. But that's part of being a grandparent is just letting go too. So I—it's—you get a little older and you start looking back and all the things that were horrible and traumatic and terrible just aren't that terrible anymore. And if the kids or the married in ex-kids or whatever will listen to you, you can have a good, positive, Well yeah her dad used to do this and this is what we do for that and see if that works and sometimes it does, sometimes it doesn't. It's kind of neat.

02:19:31

ALBIN: Well thank you very much.

02:19:33

MILLER: Sure (laughs)

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02:19:35

ALBIN: You've been great.

[section removed]

[end]

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